

Small World/ Big Divides

OUR SHARED HUMANITY TOOK CENTER STAGE ON OCTOBER 18, WHEN leading diplomats and human rights activists from around the world convened at Syracuse University for an international summit focused on generating practical solutions for peace. The event, *Small World/Big Divides: Building Bridges in an Age of Extremes*, featured an afternoon of discussions examining conventional peacemaking efforts and exploring new strategies for ending violent conflict and establishing global justice and well-being. International leaders, scholars, and journalists enriched the conversation with a wide range of personal experiences and perspectives incorporating history, culture, geography, government, religion, education, and the humanities. The dialogue featured the expertise of the panelists, which included SU faculty and alumni, and also engaged community members, who posed questions to the group. “The summit was an important moment for Syracuse

University, our community, and, in some ways, humankind,” says moderator David Crane G’80, Professor of Practice at the College of Law and former chief prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. “We found throughout the afternoon that, despite wide and varying positions, the more we dialogued, the more key points emerged upon which our distinguished panelists could agree. Bridging the divide started—one comment at a time.”

The summit, which celebrated the fifth anniversary of the University Lectures series, opened with a video address from

*“What bridges can we construct, upon
which to rejoice? How can our world be
made wide again, its divides made small...
our hearts made generous, kind, open,
and truly human?”*

—Tazim Kassam, Chair, Syracuse University Department of Religion



The event, held in Goldstein Auditorium, was broadcast live by C-SPAN and web-cast by CBSNews.com and the University.

SU brings together diplomats, scholars, human rights activists, and journalists to discuss ways to reach accord and transcend differences in a troubled world

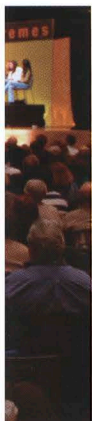
By Amy Shires

Trustee William Safire '51, H'78, a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for *The New York Times* and chair of the Dana Foundation. Chancellor Nancy Cantor then welcomed the audience of about 600, calling the event an ambitious attempt at global citizenship in Syracuse. "The cause of peace demands our individual and institutional engagement," she said. "This is our time to hear and humanize each other." The panel discussion began with three participants of the 1990s Middle East peace talks focusing on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Palestinian legislator and scholar Hanan Ashrawi spoke candidly about the challenges of conceiving possibilities for peace in the midst of the current occupation in Palestinian territories that prohibits freedom of movement, compromises access to health care and education, and creates unemployment, food shortages, and poverty. "It is hard to convince a person whose house is being demolished to love your enemy as yourself or that [the

enemies] are wonderful people," said Ashrawi, former spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East peace process and recipient of numerous international peace and human rights awards. She believes "the Palestinian question is the key and the beginning" to understanding how injustice serves as a "breeding ground for violence and hostility." And she expressed hope in humanity's potential for healing conflict around the globe by drawing on three elements: "the culture, discourse, and logic of peace," she said. "We have to rectify the causes of violence. Without the international community and international law, there can be no solution."

Ashrawi was joined on stage by Tel Aviv University president Itamar Rabinovich, who was Israel's chief negotiator with Syria in the administration of former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin; and author and diplomat Dennis Ross, U.S. point man on the Middle East peace process during two administrations and an instrumental figure

in helping the Israelis and Palestinians reach the 1995 Interim Agreement. He warned of the dangers of allowing a "dialogue of words to deteriorate into a dialogue of violence," noting the importance of opponents maintaining faith in each other as partners for peace. "We have to get each side to realize they don't have a monopoly on suffering," he said. "We have to find ways to reach into societies, to bring people together to talk about their hurts." Rabinovich agreed, stressing the urgent necessity to identify commonalities and look ahead rather than dwell on history. "We need a radical rethink that will let us get away from the failures of the past," he said. Both men expressed respect for and confidence in the diplomatic peace process, but agreed that its effectiveness depends on consistent U.S. engagement and leadership. That view was again emphasized by panelist Richard Holbrooke, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and chief architect of the 1995 Dayton



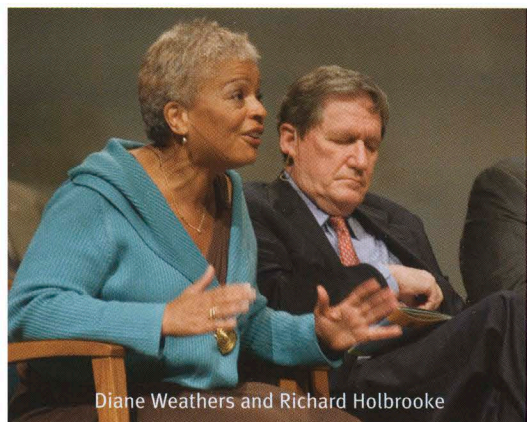
Richard Holbrooke (left) and Rami Khouri



Tazim Kassam



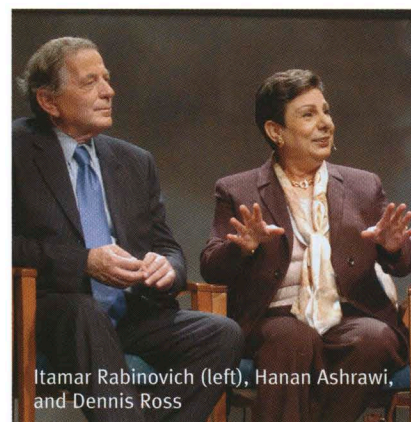
David Crane (right) emphasizes a point as panelist Ismael Ahmed looks on.



Diane Weathers and Richard Holbrooke



Chancellor Nancy Cantor gives her opening remarks at the international peace summit.



Itamar Rabinovich (left), Hanan Ashrawi, and Dennis Ross

Peace Agreement, which ended the war in Bosnia. Holbrooke expressed deep concern about the current state of affairs, saying he believes the United States is weakened by its involvement in Iraq and has disengaged from the peace process. "There is only one international negotiator, and it is not the United Nations," he said. "The United States must do more to show leadership. We need to be involved. We can act on behalf of peace. We must lead."

The conversation broadened and bridge-building concepts were introduced as additional speakers joined the panel. Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, spoke of the peacemaking role of universities as pillars of civil society and symbols of universal scholarship that transcends nationalities. Rami Khouri '70, G'98, editor at

large of the Beirut-based newspaper *The Daily Star* and a research associate at the Maxwell School, called for a comprehensive analysis of the underlying political and socioeconomic causes of terrorist acts. Micere Githae Mugo, chair of the University's Department of African American Studies, emphasized the importance of culture and the arts in "trying to create the bridge this summit is all about." A poet and playwright who was exiled from her native Kenya for her political views and social activism, Mugo also enriched the dialogue with an exploration of the impact of colonialism on Africa.

Trustee Diane Weathers '71, former editor in chief of *Essence* magazine who served as public information officer for the United Nations World Food Program in Rome, introduced ideas about the media's responsibility in promoting jus-

tice and establishing peace. Religion professor Tazim Kassam, director of the University's Muslim Cultures Program in London, pointed to the humanities as a means of creating understanding and making connections among cultures. "How do we respond to the fact of diversity, pluralism, and difference in ways that move us deeply enough to act—to give up the entitlement of the status quo?" she asked.

The panelists demonstrated a shared sense of urgency as they exposed many roots of injustice and scrutinized active systems of oppression and recurring acts of violence. They questioned the desperate criminal activity of suicide bombers. They recognized the prevalence of confusion regarding issues related to religion, ethnicity, and political allegiance. And they brought to light the need to address historical injustices

Expressions of Peace



ECHOING THE THEME OF BUILDING BRIDGES TO PEACE, A STUDENT film project and an evening concert demonstrated the healing power of communicating through the arts. Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) film student Kevin Meegan G'07 garnered a new nickname when he interviewed *Small World/Big Divides* panelist and African American studies chair Micere Githae Mugo. "She called me 'Ambush,' because of the tough questions I asked about her poetry and her exile from Kenya," he says. As part of a student film project documenting the international peace summit, Meegan filmed Mugo's backstage reflections on such weighty topics as racism, AIDS, and the importance of art. The project teamed students from Maxwell, Newhouse, and VPA, challenging them to capture the day's activities from multiple perspectives. "As videographers, we were asked to film the event from a non-journalistic, artistic point of view," Meegan says. A film of

Professor Micere Githae Mugo (right) accompanies Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai to the lectern at Hendricks Chapel.



Vartan Gregorian meets with a student at the conclusion of the discussion.

PEACE SUMMIT ON THE WEB

For more information about *Small World/Big Divides: Building Bridges in an Age of Extremes*, visit <http://buildingbridges.syr.edu>. The site features a web cast of the event.

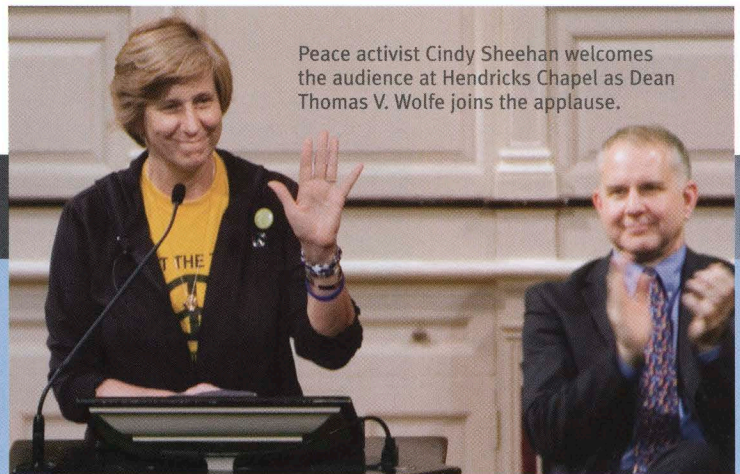
and honor cultural differences.

Crane closed the event with a reference to Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms*—a series of paintings inspired by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 speech—and encouraged the audience to consider them as basic human rights that must be upheld as the foundation for peace: freedom of expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

Through the panelists' exchange of experiences, ideas, and beliefs, it seemed evident that equality, education, communication, and a shared sense of responsibility are crucial to healing and recovery from conflict. "War will not end unless we make it end—regular people, like you and me," said panelist Ismael Ahmed, executive director of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, a non-governmental organization based in Michigan. "Our voices need to be counted in. Our voices and activity give meaning to democracy."



Recording artist Matisyahu performs at the Landmark Theatre.



Peace activist Cindy Sheehan welcomes the audience at Hendricks Chapel as Dean Thomas V. Wolfe joins the applause.

the students' work and one of the event will be packaged into a two-DVD set that will be distributed to educational institutions and community organizations across the United States.

That night's concert at the Landmark Theatre in downtown Syracuse also expanded on the day's discussions by bringing together artists of different backgrounds who share an approach that bridges traditional divides. The performance featured Matisyahu, who fuses orthodox Judaism with hip-hop and classic reggae music. He was joined by Kenny Muhammad—known as "The Human Orchestra"—and State Radio, a rock/reggae/indie band that often performs at antiwar rallies and encourages concert-goers to engage in social action.

Additional events on campus that week contributed to the positive energy generated by the summit, focusing on the distinct perspectives of women and the diverse roles they play in bridging cultures and working toward peace. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

Wangari Maathai, an environmentalist who founded the Green Belt Movement that led to the planting of more than 30 million trees in Kenya, spoke about the links between sustainable development, democracy, and peace. Peace activist Cindy Sheehan, founding member of the Gold Star Families for Peace, was joined by feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe for a speech at Hendricks Chapel. The two women opened the 2006 Feminism and War Conference that gathered feminist scholars and activists from around the globe to explore issues facing the world's women as they are affected by war and militarism.